

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1 1. A video playback device comprising:
2 a disk storage device capable of storing television
3 programs received from an external source;
4 a first controller capable of receiving a first program
5 recording command, wherein said first program recording command is
6 operable to cause said first controller to store a first television
7 program on said disk storage device during a first time slot; and
8 a second controller capable of determining if sufficient
9 space is available on said disk storage device to store said first
10 television program, wherein said disk storage device, in response
11 to a determination that sufficient space is not available on said
12 disk storage device is further capable of identifying in an
13 external communication network a second remote video playback
14 device capable of recording said first television program and
15 transmitting a recording task request to said second remote video
16 playback device, wherein said recording task request is operable to
17 cause said second remote video playback device to record said first
18 television program during said first time slot.

1 2. The video playback device as set forth in Claim 1 wherein
2 said second controller is further capable of comparing said first
3 program recording command to a second program recording command
4 previously received by said first controller and determining if a
5 second time slot associated with said second program recording
6 command overlaps said first time slot.

1 3. The video playback device as set forth in Claim 2 wherein
2 said second controller, in response to a determination that said
3 first and second time slots overlap, is further capable of
4 accessing said second remote video playback device via said
5 external communication network and transmitting said recording task
6 request to said second remote video playback device, wherein said
7 recording task request is operable to cause said second remote
8 video playback device to record said first television program
9 during said first time slot.

1 4. The video playback device as set forth in Claim 3 further
2 comprising a memory for storing said first and second program
3 recording commands in a recording schedule table.

1 5. The video playback device as set forth in Claim 3 wherein
2 said second controller identifies said second remote video playback
3 device by accessing a central server in said external communication
4 network and requesting from said central server a list of remote
5 video playback devices capable of recording said first television
6 program.

1 6. The video playback device as set forth in Claim 5 wherein
2 said second controller is capable of transmitting to said central
3 server disk space status information regarding an amount of
4 available space on said disk storage device.

1 7. The video playback device as set forth in Claim 6 wherein
2 said second controller is further capable of transmitting to said
3 central server a program recording schedule regarding television
4 programs scheduled to be recorded by said video playback device.

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1 8. The video playback device as set forth in Claim 7 wherein
2 said second controller is further capable of receiving from a third
3 video playback device an incoming recording task request, wherein
4 said incoming recording task request is operable to cause said
5 video playback device to record a requested television program
6 associated with said incoming recording task request.

1 9. A method of operating a video playback device comprising
2 a disk storage device capable of storing television programs
3 received from an external source, the method comprising the steps
4 of:

5 receiving a first program recording command, wherein the
6 first program recording command is operable to cause the video
7 playback device to store a first television program on the disk
8 storage device during a first time slot;

9 determining if sufficient space is available on the disk
10 storage device to store the first television program;

11 in response to a determination that sufficient space is
12 not available on the disk storage device, identifying in an
13 external communication network a second remote video playback
14 device capable of recording the first television program; and

15 transmitting a recording task request to the second
16 remote video playback device, wherein the recording task request is
17 operable to cause the second remote video playback device to record
18 the first television program during the first time slot.

1 10. The method as set forth in Claim 9 comprising the further
2 steps of:

3 comparing the first program recording command to a second
4 program recording command previously received by the first
5 controller; and

6 determining if a second time slot associated with the
7 second program recording command overlaps the first time slot.

1 11. The method as set forth in Claim 10 comprising the
2 further steps of:

3 in response to a determination that the first and second
4 time slots overlap, accessing the second remote video playback
5 device via the external communication network; and

6 transmitting the recording task request to the second
7 remote video playback device, wherein the recording task request is
8 operable to cause the second remote video playback device to record
9 the first television program during the first time slot.

1 12. The method as set forth in Claim 11 wherein the disk
2 storage device stores the first and second program recording
3 commands in a recording schedule table.

1 13. The method as set forth in Claim 11 wherein the step of
2 identifying the second remote video playback device comprises the
3 sub-steps of:

4 accessing a central server in the external communication
5 network; and

6 requesting from the central server a list of remote video
7 playback devices capable of recording the first television program.

1 14. The method as set forth in Claim 13 further comprising
2 the steps of:

3 transmitting to the central server disk space status
4 information regarding an amount of available space on the disk
5 storage device.

1 15. The method as set forth in Claim 14 further comprising
2 the steps of transmitting to the central server a program recording
3 schedule regarding television programs scheduled to be recorded by
4 the video playback device.

1 16. The method as set forth in Claim 15 further comprising
2 the steps of:
3 receiving from a third video playback device an incoming
4 recording task request, wherein the incoming recording task request
5 is operable to cause the video playback device to record a
6 requested television program associated with the incoming recording
7 task request.

1 17. For use in a communication network coupled to a plurality
2 of video playback devices, a server comprising a memory for storing
3 a plurality of data files related to said plurality of video
4 playback devices, wherein each of said plurality of data files
5 comprises a disk status indicator indicating an amount of free
6 space available on a disk drive in a selected one of said video
7 playback devices.

1 18. The server as set forth in Claim 17 wherein each of said
2 plurality of data files further comprises a recording schedule
3 table indicating a list of television programs scheduled to be
4 recorded by said selected one of said video playback devices.

1 19. The server as set forth in Claim 18 wherein said server
2 is capable of receiving from a first one of said video playback
3 devices a recording task request associated with a first television
4 program, wherein said server, in response to receipt of said
5 recording task request determines a second one of said video
6 playback devices capable of recording said first television
7 program.

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1 20. The server as set forth in Claim 19 wherein said server
2 transmits to said first video playback device a network address
3 associated with said second video playback device.